



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

July 29, 2005

News Release

\$279,435 AWARDED TO IREDELL COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE AND STATESVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT BY ICE

Statesville, NC—Jeff Jordan, assistant special-in-charge of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in North Carolina presented checks today totaling \$279, 435 to the Statesville Police Department and the Iredell County Sheriff's Office.

The monies awarded were from a seizure that was part of "Operation Tar Heel gauntlet", an ICE investigative initiative that targets the bulk cash smuggling activities of drug trafficking and money laundering organizations that utilize the inter-state highway system located within the middle and western judicial districts of North Carolina.

The \$279,435 was seized as a result of a joint operation conducted by ICE, the Iredell County Sheriff's Office and the Statesville Police Department during several routine traffic stops.

Luis Fernando Baldenegro-Villa was among the individuals stopped for routine traffic violations. Officers discovered that Baldenegro-Villa had hidden \$410, 962 in his vehicle. He subsequently pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 12 months in prison.

Another seizure resulted out of a vehicle stopped for displaying invalid tags. The driver, who provided inconsistent statements, consented to a search of the vehicle. The officers found bundles of money using special inspection devices. The driver denied knowledge of the currency and ICE seized it under 18 USC 981, as drug proceeds.

"Operation Tar Heel Gauntlet" is a cooperative effort between ICE and state and local enforcement officers in North Carolina," said Jeff Jordan. "This successful partnership and the seizures strengthen our ability to fight crime on a broader spectrum while providing additional funding for improving our organizations."

ICE's Asset Forfeiture Program, initiated under the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984, provides funding to state and local law enforcement agencies that participate in ICE investigations that lead to seizures and forfeitures. The law allows the government to take illegal profits from crimes such as narcotics smuggling, money laundering and fraud.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.